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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 001373

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STATE FOR AF/W
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: GOVERNOR ODILI ANNOUNCES PRESIDENTIAL BID

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for Reason 1.4 (B) and (D)
) .

11. (C) Summary. Due to his purported friendship with President Obasanjo and the money at his disposal, Rivers State Governor Peter Odili is currently the south's most formidable candidate for the 2007 PDP presidential nomination. His Igbo heritage and south-south background serve to make him an attractive candidate in the eyes of those party insiders who want the presidency to remain in southern hands. However, Odili will have a difficult time convincing the PDP's northern members of the need to delay their quest for a geographic shift. Moreover, his closeness to Obasanjo is a dality, the negative aspect of which is that Obasanjo's unpopularity will become his. Also, Odili will be dogged by accusations of corruption and his own mediocre performance at his current station. Nevertheless, if he continues in the President's good graces and the President retains control of the powerful PDP election machinery, Odili has more than a fair chance of being on the PDP presidential ticket. End Summary.

Odili's Loyalty Keeps Him in Obasanjo's Good Graces

12. (C) Most interlocutors believe President Obasanjo's preferred option is to extend his term. Should he fail in this, many contacts believe the president's fall back will be Rivers State Governor Peter Odili. Those who see Odili emerging are generally proponents of the presidency remaining in the hands of southern Nigeria and not returning to the North. These southern chauvinists are less interested in a candidate's substantive program. Their minds are almost monopolized by thoughts of who has the clout and assets to seize control of the PDP power structure in the south. They also argue that although the PDP is a national party, it is stronger below Nigeria's Mason-Dixon line than above it. Thus, the next candidate should come from the party's locus of strength. Additionally, they state that the south-south, given it is the home of the country's oil revenue, is Nigeria's most strategic region. Consequently, the new President should be a son of the south-south's soil.

13. (C) Additionally, many contacts cite Odili's loyalty and obedience to the President--some would say obsequiousness--are qualities the President values. That Odili has apparently been giving the President generous dollops of money over the years has cemented the relationship. That President Obasanjo and Governor Odili are reported to be the hidden investors behind the recent formation of Arik Airlines, the nation's second carrier, indicates the bond may be getting even stronger, not fraying. Because Odili purportedly is a partner in Arik and other

ventures, President Obasanjo can be sure Odili will not conduct an adversarial financial post-mortem on his administration. Many observers believe Obasanjo is preoccupied with the thought of being returned to prison, and is looking for a successor who will eliminate this concern.

Odili: The Ideal South-South Candidate?

¶4. (C) To many, Odili appears to be a strong south-south candidate. Supporters such as Nigeria's Ambassador to the United States, George Obiozor, mentioned that Odili is an excellent selection because his ascendancy would douse tension in the strategically important Niger Delta. The very fact that he hails from Rivers State would provide a respite to the instability in the area. Should the next president be other than a south-south candidate, the Delta could quickly combust, Obiozor predicted. South-south detractors claim that Odili is venal and his performance has lacked luster. Some attribute the rise of armed militias to his authorship. In many south-south circles, Odili's name is not bandied with much affection--his popularity is suspect. Other critics bemoan that security conditions worsened during his tenure as chief executive of his state, and that this is but a harbinger of what would happen should he elevate to become the nation's first citizen.

¶5. (C) Odili is an ethnic Igbo and that could win him points in the mainly Igbo southeast. However, Odili has not been considered a hero in the Igbo community. Until now, he has downplayed his ethnicity, seeing it as a political liability in the south-south. Now, with his eyes set on broader horizons, his strategy is to portray himself as a proud Igbo from the south-south, thus linking two of southern Nigeria's

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political zones.

Odili Vulnerable on Rivers State Development

¶6. (C) Governor Odili's bid for the presidency comes ostensibly to give the south-south its first taste of national power. However, Odili's performance as governor has received harsh reviews from within the region he purportedly is championing. Although his state has done some road construction and some power projects, Mission contacts generally decry a lack of development in Rivers State, especially outside of Port Harcourt. Ostensibly to spur development, Governor Odili started the Rivers State Sustainable Development Project (RSSDP). The RSSDP identified twelve projects ranging from rural telephony to aquaculture to community health services. Although intended to be "quick results projects", more than one year will have elapsed from the projects' announcement to the first project's expected launch in January of 2007. In short, the RSSDP has failed to deliver jobs, health care or basic governmental services in the state.

Odili's Campaign Funding: Rivers State Oil Revenue

¶7. (C) Presidential campaigns cost money and this is something Odili has in abundance. As Governor of Rivers State, he controls the 13 percent share (derivation) that the state receives every month from the Federal Government as its portion of oil revenues. Most people believe Odili is liberally using state funds as subvention for his presidential campaign. While critics cry foul, most politicians see this as an asset that makes Odili a strong candidate. The funds can be used to attract support and influence the party in a system where many politicians cast their loyalty to whosoever can pay for it.

COMMENT

18. (C) One's assessment of Governor Odili's chances depends on what type of electoral process that person envisions. The more one sees this election and party nomination as an exercise reflecting popular opinion, the weaker are Odili's chances. However, the more the process looks to be an exercise guided by elite interests, the more attractive Odili becomes. His money will attract a crop of politicians. His Igbo ethnicity and south-south political home links him to two geo-political zones in the south. His closeness to President Obasanjo will open the door to the third southern zone. An attractive northern vice presidential candidate would then provide linkage to another zone, giving Odili significant connections in four of Nigeria's six zones. In the equation of elite politics, this outcome is an impressive one.

19. (C) While these calculations seem superficial to outsiders, they hold significant meaning to many Nigerian politicians. At the end of the day, Odili's chances of gaining the PDP nomination hinge on his relationship to President Obasanjo. After that, his chances of winning the big prize will depend on his ability to campaign and to explain his record, the quality of his opponents, and perhaps most importantly, on whether the PDP can use the power of incumbency to influence the election as it did in 2003. End Comment.
BROWNE